

EXPOSITORY  
REFLECTIONS

*on the*

GOSPELS

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*Mark*



*written by*

DOUGLAS SEAN  
O'DONNELL

“Doug O’Donnell’s expository labors provide preachers and teachers with a sure-footed guide to and through the wonders of Mark’s Gospel. His work rests on his having systematically marinated his thought in the carefully wrought literary and theological contours of Mark’s account, so that his homiletical divisions are true to Mark’s mounting argument and a boon to expositors. O’Donnell’s exegesis and homiletical wisdom rest not only on the shoulders of past preachers but also on his having mined the refreshing Marcan exegesis available in today’s journals and superb new commentaries—resulting in increased precision and homiletical clarity. In this respect, O’Donnell has long been a notable wordsmith. The shepherding, pastoral tone that permeates this commentary is evident on nearly every page, with astute applications that can come only from a sensitive preacher in touch with life and contemporary culture, as well as with illustrations that actually do serve the sacred text. Confidently recommended.”

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“This learned, profound, utterly practical commentary is a great model for preachers of the Gospel of Mark. It will help them to practice faithful biblical exegesis, goad them to keep their teaching focused on Jesus, and thereby encourage those who listen to their sermons to ‘arise and follow the Son.’ O’Donnell here reminds you why you answered God’s call to be a minister of the Word and supports you in your efforts to unpack this precious book.”

**Douglas A. Sweeney**, Dean and Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School,  
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“The most obvious virtue of this commentary is its thoroughness. It is a triumph of scholarship—a one-volume library of the best that has been written on the Gospel of Mark. But it is more than that—a blend of head and heart, with the author’s intermittent sharing of his life experiences lending both human interest and a testimony to the reality of the good news.”

**Leland Ryken**, Emeritus Professor of English, Wheaton College

“With seamless synergy between exegesis and the everyday, Doug O’Donnell masterfully dissects and demystifies the Gospel of Mark to aid preachers in feeding their flocks. Having once preached through Mark myself, I wish this resource had been available then. Thankfully, it exists now, and it will be of tremendous benefit to clear preachers and engaged hearers as well as zigzagging preachers and meandering listeners.”

**Matthew D. Kim**, Professor of Practical Theology and Raborn Chair of Pastoral Leadership, Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University; author, *A Little Book for New Preachers*

“The church has long been nourished by pastor-theologians who have the intellectual gifts and pastoral sensibilities to understand God’s Word and apply it to God’s world. Doug O’Donnell is a modern-day representative who serves in this historic office. In his *Expository Reflections on the Gospels: Mark*, O’Donnell conducts a symphony involving a critical (in the good sense!) interpretation of the biblical text in its historical context, a confessional understanding of the theological subject matter of Scripture, and a contextual integration that applies the message of the Gospel of Mark to the lives and realities of the reader. This is a top-tier resource for every pastor and preacher.”

**Edward W. Klink III**, Senior Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Roscoe, Illinois; Professor, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; author, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)

“Following some of the best Protestant expository traditions, Doug O’Donnell’s lucid expositions of Mark remind us how to read the Gospels as the anchor of the New Testament and the centerpiece of the story of Jesus the Messiah! Lovers of the second Gospel should have this volume before them regularly. Each sermonic chapter faithfully explains the significance of Mark’s portrayal of redemption in the promised Son for us. My joy in reading Mark deepened with the turn of every page of this work.”

**Eric C. Redmond**, Professor of Bible, Moody Bible Institute; Associate Pastor of Preaching and Teaching, Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, Illinois

“Doug O’Donnell’s commentary on Mark’s Gospel is a remarkable piece of work. Grounded in a meticulous study of the text and sensitive to its theological contours, he offers fresh insight that is readily accessible to the preacher and layperson alike. O’Donnell’s poetic turns of phrase, engaging wit, and pastoral sensibility make it a resource that every Christian will want to have on the shelf.”

**Chris Castaldo**, Senior Pastor, New Covenant Church, Naperville, Illinois; author, *The Upside Down Kingdom: Wisdom for Life from the Beatitudes*

“Readers who want an in-depth understanding of the Gospels yet also want to be fed spiritually will often turn to commentaries, only to realize that the gap between critical interpretation and exposition—between historical-theological analysis and everyday life—can be hard to cross. It’s difficult to find either a lively exposition of the text that is responsive to cutting-edge scholarship or an erudite commentary that comes alive. Thankfully, in reading the Gospel of Mark alongside us, Doug O’Donnell has provided us with both—in one book.”

**Nicholas Perrin**, President, Trinity International University

“Doug O’Donnell’s expository reflections on Mark do for us what the Gospel itself does: they focus us on Jesus, the saving Son of God, and call us to ‘arise and follow the Son.’ Informed by sound scholarship yet easily accessible, grounded in a close reading of the text yet applied to real life, these reflections lead us again and again to Christ—to his words and his works, his cross and his resurrection, his rule and his return. Read, mark, and learn!”

**Murray Smith**, Lecturer in Biblical Theology and Exegesis, Christ College, Sydney

“Doug O’Donnell has given us a thorough exposition that is wonderfully refreshing. What particularly struck me is that there is a model here for today’s preacher: arresting and accessible teaching for the ignorant new generations, and yet serious nourishment for the mature believer and the Bible student. And that sounds something like an echo of the master teacher in the Gospel records.”

**Dick Lucas**, Former Rector, St. Helen’s Bishopsgate, London; Founder, The Proclamation Trust

“With the mind of a scholar and the heart of a pastor, O’Donnell has provided an exegetically rich and practically applicable exposition of this shortest Gospel account. This commentary takes us into the heart of the text and reveals with clarity how to apply the text to our own hearts. Highly recommended!”

**Matthew Newkirk**, President and Professor of Old Testament, Christ Bible Seminary, Nagoya, Japan



Expository Reflections  
on the Gospels

Mark



VOLUME 3

# Expository Reflections on the Gospels

## Mark

*Arise and Follow the Son*

Douglas Sean O'Donnell

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*To my granddaughter Sydney Gene, one of my greatest joys!*



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# Preface

## TO THE EXPOSITORY REFLECTIONS ON THE GOSPELS

Throughout history every major branch of the Christian church—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant—has preached through the Four Gospels more than any other section of Scripture. This is due to (1) liturgical traditions in which the Gospel reading is the final Scripture reading and the preacher’s sermon or homily is typically on that reading and (2) the fact that the Gospels have rightly been viewed by pastors as directly evangelistic and essential for discipleship.

A few times throughout church history pastor-theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and J. C. Ryle have written commentaries on the Four Gospels. The *ESV Expository Reflections on the Gospels* follows in this tradition, especially that of J. C. Ryle’s *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, with his accessible and applicable exegesis. The writing style is homiletic (in the best sense!), seeking to be carefully structured (like Edwards’s sermons and treatises), exegetically deep (like Calvin’s commentaries), highly applicable (like Ryle’s still-applicable applications), deeply personable and engagingly humorous (like Luther’s writings), and rhetorically excellent (like Spurgeon, who draws his readers in through questions, real-life examples, wordplay, and other oratorical flairs).

When I reached out to Dick Lucas, a preacher I greatly admire, to write a commendation, I was delighted that he said yes and was honored that he would write of my work that I have given the church “thorough exposition that is wonderfully refreshing,” sermons that echo “the Master Teacher in the Gospel records” and that offer “a model for today’s preacher, arresting and accessible teaching.” May it be so as you journey, with me as your guide, through the Gospels!





# Preface

TO VOLUME 3, MARK

In God's kind providence my Christian life has centered around the Four Gospels. When I was nineteen, the Lord used the Gospels—particularly the story of the rich young ruler—to open my eyes to the reality of my sin and to draw me to Christ as Savior. Early in my pastoral ministry Pastor Kent Hughes invited me to write a commentary on Matthew for the Preaching the Word series. So the first sermon series I preached at New Covenant Church in Naperville, Illinois, was on the First Gospel. A decade ago, when Queensland Theological College in Brisbane, Australia, invited me to be their senior lecturer in biblical studies and practical theology, they asked me to teach two classes on the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. What a joy to teach, and learn from, my students down under. Shortly thereafter, under the splendid supervision of professors John Nolland and Nicholas Perrin, I completed my PhD dissertation at the University of Aberdeen on the topic of faith in Matthew's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Now, in this newest commentary, I am privileged to share with you what was first shared with the congregation of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Elgin, Illinois—expositions on the Gospel of Mark.

Mark, who in Acts is also called John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37),<sup>2</sup> was not an apostle, but he was in the apostolic inner circle. He was part of the

- 1 Douglas Sean O'Donnell, "*O Woman, Great Is Your Faith!*" *Faith in the Gospel of Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021).
- 2 Mark was from Jerusalem and part of a wealthy family (his mother's home was large enough to house a prayer meeting, Acts 12:12; perhaps Mark 14:14) and was connected with other wealthy Christians (Barnabas, Acts 4:36–37). From Acts 12:25 we learn that he joined Barnabas and Paul on their missionary journeys. Mark is also mentioned in Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24; and 1 Peter 5:13. Peter labels Mark his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13). This personal and familial relationship with Peter suggests the possibility that Peter was Mark's source regarding the life of Jesus (so testified by Papias of Hierapolis, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen).

group that met in the upper room after Jesus' death. Likely Simon Peter was his source, and likely he wrote this book near the end of Peter's life (AD 64–68) but before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (AD 70).<sup>3</sup> We do not know where Mark was when he wrote his Gospel (likely Rome)<sup>4</sup> or to what city or community he first sent his Gospel (a growing number of scholars believe that he intended his Gospel to circulate among as many Christian communities as possible).<sup>5</sup> It is possible that Mark wrote to unbelievers, seeking to persuade them to become believers.<sup>6</sup> But it is more likely that he wrote to believers, with these goals: (1) to remind them of what they were to believe about Jesus, (2) to instruct them in Jesus' teachings, (3) to urge them to share those stories about who Jesus is and what he has done for others, and (4) to encourage them to persevere through persecution.

In 13:14 Mark interjects, "Let the reader understand." This interjection comes in the Olivet Discourse, after Jesus speaks of the "abomination of desolation."<sup>7</sup> Mark's earnest desire is that his Christian readers would understand Jesus' teaching on the destruction of the temple and his second coming. But he also desires his readers to understand far more. He wants us to understand Jesus' identity as the Son of God, the Son of David, and the Son of Man. Moreover, Mark wants us to understand Jesus' mission—that he came to conquer the powers of evil (demons, disease, and death)—through the cross. He wants us to know by heart and embrace with our whole heart the fact that, in Jesus' own words, "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Finally, Mark wants us to understand the cost of discipleship—that we should arise and follow the Son by picking up our cross, sacrificing for others, and sharing the good news of the kingdom of heaven with the world.

3 "If one relies on external evidence, it is plausible to assume that Mark wrote in Rome before the death of Peter, whose teaching he wrote down, and that he wrote before the end of Paul's imprisonment. . . . This would mean that Mark wrote his Gospel between AD 60–62." Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 17; cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 1042–43.

4 From 1 Peter 5:13 we learn that Peter and Mark were in Rome (labeled "Babylon") together. "The city of Rome is the most plausible provenance" (Schnabel, *Mark*, 14).

5 That the Gospels were written for a broad audience, see Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

6 Gundry (*Mark*, 3–4) argues that Mark's Gospel is "an apology for the cross" in that Mark is showing that through Jesus' crucifixion (theology of suffering) Jesus inaugurates the eschatological salvation (theology of glory) of the kingdom of God. "Mark writes . . . to convert non-Christians despite the shame of the Cross" (1026).

7 See note 6 in chapter 37.

As stated above, these expositions were first preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church. I am grateful for the encouragement I received from both the session and the congregation, and I am thankful for a church community that supported my laboring, through my studies and writings, for the larger church. I am also appreciative to Frederick Dale Bruner for editing the entire second draft, Emily Gerds for reviewing the third draft, and Elliott Pinegar and Davis Wetherell for their honest pushback, wise suggestions, theological tightening, and careful stylistic and substantive sharpening of sentences.



# Abbreviations

<i>1 Macc.</i>	<i>1 Maccabees</i>
<i>4 Macc.</i>	<i>4 Maccabees</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AD	Anno Domini (in the year of our Lord)
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i> (Josephus)
AMP	Amplified Bible
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>The Jewish Antiquities</i> (Josephus)
b. Bat.	Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra
b. Ber.	Babylonian Talmud, Berakot
b. Mak.	Babylonian Talmud, Makkot
b. Šabb.	Babylonian Talmud, Šabbat
b. Sukk.	Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah
b. Ta‘an.	Babylonian Talmud, Ta‘anit
BC	Before Christ
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black’s New Testament Commentaries
BST	Bible Speaks Today
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCC	Crossway Classic Commentaries
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
<i>CHSB</i>	<i>ESV Church History Study Bible: Voices from the Past Wisdom for the Present.</i> Edited by Stephen J. Nichols, Gerald Bray, and Keith A. Mathison. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
d.	Died
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>

<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannie K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013.
<i>DNTB</i>	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EBT	Explorations in Biblical Theology
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
ESVEC	ESV Expository Commentary
FC	Fathers of the Church
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i> (Irenaeus)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Ira</i>	<i>De Ira</i> (Seneca)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i> (Josephus)
KJV	King James Version
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LXX	Septuagint
m. 'Abot	Mishnah, 'Abot
m. B. Qam.	Mishnah, Baba Qamma
m. Ber.	Mishnah, Berakot
m. Giṭ.	Mishnah, Giṭṭin
m. Kel.	Mishnah, Kelim
m. Ketub.	Mishnah, Ketubbot
m. Ned.	Mishnah, Nedarium
m. Pesah.	Mishnah, Pesahim
m. Roš Haš	Mishnah, Roš Haššanah
m. Šabb.	Mishnah, Šabbat
m. Sanh.	Mishnah, Sanhedrin
m. Ta'an.	Mishnah, Ta'anit
m. Ṭehar.	Mishnah, Ṭeharot
m. Yebam.	Mishnah, Yebamot
mg.	Margin note (textual footnote)

MSG	The Message
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	The New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NET	The NET Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTL	New Testament Library
OT	Old Testament
PHILLIPS	J. B. Phillips New Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PRS	Perspectives in Religious Studies
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
PTW	Preaching the Word
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
Str-B	Strack, H. L. and P. Billerbeck. <i>Kommenntar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> . 6 vols. Munich: Beck, 1922–1961.
t. Dan	Tosefta, Dan
t. Iss.	Tosefta, Issachar
TLB	The Living Bible
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>Tob.</i>	<i>Tobit</i>
TTCS	Teach the Text Commentary Series
<i>Verr.</i>	<i>In Verrem</i> (Cicero)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament





# Arise and Follow the Son

MARK 1:1

*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*Mark 1:1*

While attending a Christian college I began an outreach ministry at the local community college. Once a week a group of Christian students would scatter around campus and ask people whether they were interested in taking a religious survey. I do not remember all the questions we asked, but I do remember one question and the most popular answer to it. To the question “Who is Jesus?” the usual reply was “the Son of God.” When we followed up that answer with more probing questions, we discovered that Jesus as “the Son of God” can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

The Gospel of Mark was written to give God’s inspired answer to the question, Who is Jesus? Put differently, it was penned to answer, explain, and illustrate the identity of the real Jesus. So, we might say, this Gospel was written to answer the question, Who is Jesus the Son of God? It was written also to answer the questions, Why should we follow him? and, if we are compelled to follow him, How should we follow him?

Our text for this introductory chapter is quite simple: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). But our task is more complex. Here we set out to discover—or rediscover—Jesus. Who is he? What is the good news about him? And, if drawn to him, how should we respond?

## Who Is Jesus?

First, who is Jesus? In Mark 1:1 the Evangelist introduces us to the man Jesus. The name Jesus, which means “Yahweh saves,” was one of the most common names in Israel at that time. A number of recent studies indicate that the most popular male names among Palestinian Jews living between 330 BC and AD 200 were (1) Simon, (2) Joseph, (3) Lazarus, (4) Judas, (5) John, and

(6) Jesus.<sup>1</sup> So the Jesus of the Gospels was not the only Jesus in Galilee. He was not even the only Jesus of Nazareth. If someone yelled “Jesus” in Jerusalem, like Mary and Joseph must have done when looking for their son (see Luke 2:41–52), more than a few heads would have turned. It would be like yelling “Patrick” in an Irish bar in Boston or “Tony” at a bocce ball tournament at Arthur Avenue in the Bronx.

So the once trendy Jewish name “Jesus” does not define, or set apart, the Jesus we know and love. But the two titles that follow do so: “Christ” and “the Son of God.” The term “Christ” is not a last name but a designation. It means “anointed one,” or “Messiah.” It speaks of Jesus’ being the promised King from the line of David (2 Sam. 7:11–16; Isa. 9:1–7; 11:1–16). Mark uses this title eight times. Besides in this verse (Mark 1:1), which serves not only as the start of his Gospel but also as its summary sentence, the name is used regularly in other important moments as well. For example, at the structural center (see table 1.1) and theological hinge of the Gospel (Mark 8:27–29) Peter answers Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” with “You are the Christ” (8:29). At Jesus’ trial the high priest asks Jesus, “Are you the Christ?” (14:61), to which Jesus replies, “I am” (*egō eimi*, 14:62). The final time that this word is used is in 15:32, where Jesus is reviled on the cross, “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” His mockers understand correctly that the Christ is the “King of Israel,” but they fail to understand that the mission of the promised King is crucifixion. (More on that in a moment.)

Table 1.1: Outline of the Gospel of Mark

1:1–15	Introduction to the Gospel: John the Baptist and Jesus
1:16–3:6	Jesus in Galilee: Ministry and Controversy
3:7–6:6	Jesus in Galilee: Jesus Teaches and Shows His Power
6:7–8:26	Jesus in Galilee: Jesus’ Acts Yield a Confession
8:27–10:52	After a Key Confession, Jesus Heads to Jerusalem and Prepares His Disciples for the Suffering That Is to Come
11:1–16:8	In Jerusalem Jesus Meets Controversy and Rejection, Leading to His Death and Resurrection, as He Also Teaches of Suffering, Judgment, and Vindication <sup>2</sup>

- 1 See Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 85.
- 2 Darrell Bock, *Mark*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 36, emphasis mine. Whether we divide the Gospel at Mark 8:26 (before Peter’s confession) or after it (8:30),

Jesus is the “Christ.” He is also “the Son of God.” This designation does not mean that God the Father, sometime two thousand years ago, birthed a son who did not previously exist. It does not mean Jesus is a son of God in the same way every member of God’s covenant community is a child of God. And it is not merely a synonym for Christ. Rather, in Mark 1:1, and also when the Father at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration says, “This is my beloved Son” (9:7; cf. 1:11),<sup>3</sup> the title “Son of God” means that “Jesus is eternally Son of the Father, sharing his divine nature.”<sup>4</sup>

This is obviously an important title, and, like the good silverware and china, Mark brings it out only for special occasions. He uses it three times, and every usage is significant. First, it is employed in Mark’s introductory but also summary sentence (1:1). Second, it is found in two key confessions by two unexpected characters. At 3:11 we read, “Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’” The demons recognized Jesus’ identity before the disciples did! Then at 15:39 the historical record states, “When the centurion, who stood facing him [Jesus on the cross], saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” This scene and confession is dripping with irony. The Gentile soldier responsible for carrying out the orders to crucify Jesus is the first person in history to look to the crucified Christ and confess him as “the Son of God.”

So, Jesus is the “Christ” and “the Son of God.” You may notice, however, that I have subtitled this commentary *Arise and Follow the Son*. I use the word *Son* because Jesus as the Son of God is an important identity marker. But I subtitle the commentary *Arise and Follow the Son* and not *Arise and Follow the Son of God* because Mark uses two other Son titles that help us better identify this Jesus we seek to discover: Son of David and Son of Man.

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“the first half of the gospel presents Jesus as the mighty Messiah and Son of God . . . [and] the second half develops the theme of his suffering role.” Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 18. Note that “Mark employs a geographical and temporal structure to help the audience join episodes and relate them one to another” and that “temporal vocabulary—such as ἡμέρα (5x), πρῶτ (5x), and ὅψια (6x)—joins episodes”; Elizabeth Evans Shively, “Mark,” in *The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge, Guided Annotating Edition*, ed. Daniel K. Eng (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 129. Cf. Shively, “The Eclipse of the Markan Narrative: On the (Re)cognition of a Coherent Story and Implications for Genre,” *Early Christianity* 12 (2021): 369–87.

3 Cf. 2 Samuel 7:11–14; Psalms 2:7; 89:26.

4 Hans F. Bayer, *A Theology of Mark: The Dynamic between Christology and Authentic Discipleship*, EBT (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), 51. Jesus is also called the Father’s “beloved Son” at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration (Mark 1:11; 9:7). Other references to Jesus as the “Son” include “my son” (12:6) in the parable of the tenants, the demons’ declaration (“the Son of the Most High God,” 3:11; 5:7), and Jesus’ own usage (he calls himself the “Son” in 13:32) and affirmation (his “I am” to the question, “Are you . . . the Son of the Blessed?,” 14:61, 62). For an excellent summary on the textual variant “Son of God” in Mark 1:1 see Strauss, *Mark*, 60–61.

More will be said about those titles when we come to them in the various narratives. For now, I will simply say that Son of David is closely connected to Christ (12:35), and Son of Man to Son of God. Jesus is the Christ (the anointed King) from the lineage of David. He fulfills the Davidic covenant. Moreover, Jesus is the Son of Man.<sup>5</sup> He is the Son of Man in his humble human state (Matt. 8:20) and in his humiliation—his rejection and sufferings (Mark 8:31; 10:45; 14:21, 36). But also, alluding to the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13–14, Jesus is the exalted figure who is worshiped alongside the Ancient of Days. In Mark, Jesus as the Son of Man acts like God: he forgives sins (Mark 2:10), rules over the Sabbath (2:28), and will judge the world (8:38; 13:26). The Christ is the Son of David; the Son of God is the Son of Man. Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the Son of God, and the Son of Man.

Three times in Mark questions are raised about Jesus' identity. After hearing his wise words and witnessing his mighty works, Jesus' hometown asks, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?" (6:3). Then, after the calming of the storm the disciples ask, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41). Finally, Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" (8:27). If we survey the whole of the Gospel, what follows are Mark's answers to those questions. Some call him teacher, rabbi, and Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>6</sup> Some believe he is a prophet (see 6:15; 8:28). But Jesus is more than a prophet and teacher from Nazareth. Mark makes sure we know that Jesus is the King of the Jews (15:2; cf. King of Israel, 15:32), the Lord (1:3), the Holy One of God (1:24), the Son of David (10:47), the Son of Man (2:10), the Son of the Most High God (5:7), the stone that the builders rejected (12:10), the bridegroom (2:19), the Christ (1:1), and the Son of God (1:1; cf. God's beloved son, 1:11; 9:7; the Son, 12:6; 13:32; the Son of the Blessed, 14:61). Jesus' *identity* is important to Mark!

Before we turn our attention to the phrase "the gospel of Jesus" (1:1), we should take away three important ideas from the phrase "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." First, we must read this Gospel with Jesus in focus. Oftentimes we read, or are tempted to read, the Bible existentially. What does the Bible say to me directly? For example, we read about the healing of the paralytic and think, "Jesus can heal my bad back," or we read about his teaching on fasting and think, "Jesus can help me keep my diet." Maybe our interpretations and applications are not that off base. But I hope you understand my point. We tend to think about ourselves first and then, if ever, about the

5 This title is used fourteen times in Mark, and every reference comes from Jesus and is about Jesus.

6 "Teacher" (Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14), "rabbi" (9:5; 10:51; 11:21; 14:45), "the Nazarene" (14:67; cf. 1:24; 16:6).

original message to the original audience. In his opening verse Mark makes sure that our focus is Godward. He opens his Gospel with a statement not about us but about God's Son. He does this because he wants us to know how much Jesus matters. He wants to introduce us to a character—the hero in his great drama.

The second takeaway is that understanding who Jesus is really matters. Jesus' identity matters to Mark, and should matter to us, *because* our salvation depends on it. Jesus' atonement is directly connected to his incarnation. The Son of God became fully and completely human in order to die for our sins. So, when people say, "It does not matter what church you go to as long as it believes in Jesus," we need to reply, "But what 'Jesus' does that church believe in and teach about? Does it confess and profess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?" Moreover, when we encounter a religious group that denies the deity of Jesus, we need to recognize that our conversation is a matter of life and death. We are saved from our sin not by the man Jesus but by the God-man, the one who atoned for all our sins and turned away God's judgment upon that sin because he is fully God and fully man.

The third takeaway from the line "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" involves how we should read each and every section of Mark's Gospel. Mark has given us the lens with which to see Jesus properly. So when we read of Jesus' claiming to be the Lord of the Sabbath (2:27–28), sleeping through a storm (4:38); loving a hungry crowd (8:2); blessing the little children (10:14–16); cursing a fig tree and condemning the temple thieves (11:15–25); teaching the greatest commandment (12:28–34); predicting his sufferings, death, and resurrection (8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:23–24), along with his second coming (13:24–27); and then actually dying and rising (15:21–39; 16:1–8), for each and every action and saying we should think, "This is the Christ, the Son of God!"

### What Is the Gospel about Jesus?

What is the importance of getting Jesus' identity right? Everything! Why does Mark start this way? Because if we get the *person* of Jesus wrong, we will get the *plan* of Jesus wrong. If we do not know that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God, then the gospel about him ("the beginning of the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," 1:1) makes no sense. So then, moving from answering the question, Who is Jesus? let us next answer the question, What has Jesus done, and why is it good news for us?

Jesus' first recorded speech in the Gospel of Mark is "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (1:15). That announcement follows directly after Mark's statement that "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the

gospel of God” (1:14). Jesus came to announce the good news of the kingdom of God. However, he came to do more than announce the gospel and kingdom; he came to declare and demonstrate his rule as the King of that kingdom. And he does so through his authoritative teaching and powerful miracles.<sup>7</sup> His every *word* and *work* attest to his identity and mission.

His memorable *words* include the following: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (2:17); “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (8:36); “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (9:35); “Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (10:44); “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (12:17); “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (12:31); “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (14:24); “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34). Jesus’ last words are his cry upon the cross. How telling is that!

Jesus’ every word attests to his identity and mission, as does every work. Here is a sampling of his *works*: he feeds thousands of people with a few pieces of bread and fish (6:30–44; 8:1–10); expels demons (1:21–28; 5:1–20; 7:24–30; 9:14–29); heals the leper (1:40–45), the paralytic (2:1–12), and the deaf and mute (7:31–37); raises the dead (5:21–43); calms a storm (4:35–41); walks on water (6:45–52). And, of course, Jesus suffers, dies, and rises. And before he accomplishes those works, he interprets all his actions in one short clause: “The Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many” (10:45). In 2:10 Jesus claims to have the authority to forgive sins, and in 15:37 (“And Jesus . . . breathed his last”) that forgiveness is accomplished and finally, through faith, applied to us. And that is good news! Jesus paid it all. He has canceled our debt. We who were enslaved to sin, death, and Satan have been set free. In his rejection and resurrection the Christ conquers all the evils we face and that have long held us captive. Praise God! What a Savior he has sent! “The *gospel* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1).

### *Read, Mark, Learn*

Whenever I set out to preach on a book of the Bible, I read the book many times. So when I decided that the Gospel of Mark was what my congregation needed to hear preached, I read through it devotionally. Then, when it came

7 Elizabeth Struthers Malbon calls Jesus’ actions “enacted Christology.” “Reflected Christology’: An Aspect of Narrative ‘Christology’ in the Gospel of Mark,” *PRS* 26 (1999): 136. Adela Yarbo Collins claims, “Jesus is portrayed as Son of God narratively, by recounting his mighty deeds, his authoritative teaching, his prophecy, and his death for the benefit of others.” “Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans,” *HTR* 93 (2000): 100.

time to study it in greater depth, I printed out the book in its entirety and I started to read Mark and mark Mark up.

The first time I read through Mark, I got a feel for it, noting its unusual literary form (a gospel)<sup>8</sup> and its variety of genres—narratives, discourses, commands, parables, and apocalyptic pronouncement and prophecies. The second time I put a box around every title for Jesus and underlined every time there was a question about Jesus’ identity. The third time I noted some of the details. I highlighted the geography, noting that Jesus moves from Galilee to Jerusalem. I noted Mark’s use of the OT, writing an *OT* next to all the OT quotations and possible allusions. I highlighted the times Jesus commands people to be quiet. I noticed that Mark has a disputed ending. Does it end at 16:8 or 16:20?<sup>9</sup> I noticed that Mark’s storytelling skills remind me of the live report from an on-the-scene journalist.<sup>10</sup> I observed his “dualisms”<sup>11</sup> (i.e., he says one phrase and then says the same thing with minor variations) and interpretive intercalations (an episode within an episode; e.g., 5:21–43).<sup>12</sup> I saw that Mark’s Gospel not only is shorter than the other canonical Gospels<sup>13</sup> but has a fast-paced quality to it.<sup>14</sup> Often with the adverb

- 8 As a genre, Mark’s Gospel was “a completely new kind of book. . . . No one had ever written [a Gospel] before. In fact, no one would have known what a Gospel was!” Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Let’s Study Mark* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), xiii. That said, Mark’s narrative shares some features of Greco-Roman *bioi* (biographies of important people). Moreover, and more notably, it resembles OT biographical material (e.g., the life of David in 1–2 Samuel) in that it has a didactic purpose.
- 9 The oldest Greek manuscripts (א, Codex Sinaiticus; B, Codex Vaticanus) do not contain Mark 16:9–20. “In the oldest commentary on Mark’s Gospel, by Victor of Antioch, we find a note attached to the longer ending . . . that says, ‘In most copies this additional material according to Mark is not found.’” Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 19. Based on external (above) and internal (e.g., nine new words are introduced) evidence, the scholarly consensus since 1881 (Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*) is that the longer ending is not original. Cf. James W. Voelz, *Mark 8:27–16:8*; Christopher W. Mitchell, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 1201–1204, esp. “Excursus 19: A Consideration of the ‘Longer Ending’ of Mark: 16:9–20” (1222–37).
- 10 “Mark is . . . fond of the *historical present tense* (151 times), a Greek construction that uses present tense verbs in narrative to describe past actions. Though characteristic of a less-refined Greek style, it also gives that narrative a vivid style, like an on-the-spot report” (Strauss, *Mark*, 46).
- 11 E.g., “that evening at sundown,” or more literally, “evening having come,” which is the same as saying, “when the sun set” (Mark 1:32; cf. 1:35; 2:20; 4:35; 10:30; 13:29).
- 12 These are also called “Markan sandwiches.” See Tom Shepherd, *Markan Sandwich Stories* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).
- 13 In the Greek texts Mark has 11,304 words (with the longer ending), Matthew 18,346, Luke 19,482, and John 15,635. Mark’s Gospel especially lends itself to memorization and public recitation. Some scholars believe that this was Mark’s original intent, suggesting that the written Gospel could be based on an oral Gospel that was performed.
- 14 “Compared with Matthew and Luke, who report lengthy sections of Jesus’ teaching, and compared with John, who provides more substantial and explicit theological interpretation, Mark



*immediately* and the conjunction *and* Mark quickly moves his readers from one story to the next.<sup>15</sup> Yet I also noticed that the tempo slows down during the week of Jesus' crucifixion. Mark describes each day of Jesus' final week and nearly each hour of his passion and death. With the slow motion, frame-by-frame depiction Mark is answering this question: What has Jesus accomplished, and why is it good news for us? The fourth time through I underlined what Jesus says and does, and how people respond to him. To those observations we turn to next.

### How Should We Respond to the Gospel? Arise and Follow

Mark does not just talk about who Jesus is and what he has done. He also highlights various responses to him. There are wrong responses and right ones. And through the various characters who encounter Jesus, we ourselves enter into the drama. With each character we should ask ourselves, Should we imitate their response to Jesus or not?

For example, we *should not* say about Jesus, as the scribes did, "He is possessed by Beelzebul" (3:22); or join Peter at the transfiguration in making Jesus equal with Moses and Elijah (wanting to build a tent for each, 9:5); or follow the rich man in not following Jesus' call (10:17–22); or betray Jesus like Judas does (14:43–46); or repeatedly deny Jesus like Peter does (14:66–72); or ridicule Jesus as Pilate does (15:9, 26); or mock him like the Roman soldiers (15:16–20), the chief priests, and the scribes do (15:31–32). But we *should* follow Jesus like Simon, Andrew, James, and John (1:16–20); join the leper on our knees before Jesus, saying, "Make me clean" (1:40); and humbly acknowledge, as the father of the demon-possessed boy does, our need for Jesus' help—not only to deliver us from evil but to grow our faith: "[We] believe; help [our] unbelief" (9:24). We should also see with blind Bartimaeus that Jesus, as the Son of David, is able to cure both physical and spiritual blindness: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (10:47). And we should shout

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wrote a vivid, action-packed narrative. . . . Mark's paratactical, anecdotal style leaves his hearers and readers with the impression of fast-paced action. The evangelist moves Jesus and the disciples quickly from event to event. . . . Mark presents Jesus' ministry as a series of dramatic events with hardly a pause" (Schnabel, *Mark*, 1, 5).

- 15 I learned later that *καί* ("and"), which is used over a thousand times, and *εὐθὺς* ("immediately") forty-seven times are "paired 25 times in Mark's Gospel (and only three other times in the rest of the NT)," and that Mark, imitating "the paratactic style of Hebrew prose narrative," uses often *καί* and rarely *δέ* ("but"). Moreover, Mark's uses of doubling (e.g., "that evening at sundown," 1:32) and tripling (e.g., "rise, take up your bed, and walk," 2:9, 11, 12) "evokes a sense of progressive intensity." Thus I agree with scholars throughout the ages, and most recently Shively, whom I quote above and next: "Together these terms convey a sense of urgency and forward movement" ("Mark," 130).

aloud with the crowd, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (11:9–10). Yes, indeed. Lord, save us! We should, moreover, like the woman who comes with an expensive bottle of perfume, pour out a year’s wages upon Jesus (14:3–9) and join in the centurion’s cry at the cross, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (15:39).

In 13:14 Mark exclaims, “Let the reader understand.” But Mark wants his readers to understand not only the Olivet Discourse (where we find that interjection). He wants us to understand who Jesus is, what he has done for us, and how we should respond to him. One way in which Mark teaches his readers to respond to Jesus is through key characters; we are to respond like him and her and them. Another way is through key commands. For example, in 8:27–38 Jesus asks his disciples about his identity: “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples cite various wrong answers. Some say that Jesus is John the Baptist; others Elijah or one of the prophets. “But who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks. Peter answers, “You are the Christ.” This is the correct answer. Peter understands Jesus’ identity. But, as we soon learn, he does not yet understand Jesus’ mission. When Jesus next talks about the necessity of his death, Peter takes him aside to rebuke him. It is the worst counseling session in the history of the world.

In Mark, identity (who Jesus is) and mission (why Jesus came and why his coming is good news) go together. As does the call to discipleship. How do we respond to the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ and the Son of God? Jesus tells us in Mark 8:34: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” What a challenge! The cost of discipleship. No cheap grace from gracious Jesus.

How will we respond to Jesus? I hope that we do so the way Mark wants us to. Will we follow, listen to, obey, and humbly serve Jesus? Will we suffer for Jesus, look to Jesus’ death and resurrection as our only hope of salvation, and await Jesus’ return? To Mark, those who genuinely believe the good news of Jesus the Christ and the Son of God respond in certain ways. Self-denial. Cross-bearing. Total dependence. Radical allegiance.

Arise and *follow* the Son!

### Answering Life’s Big Questions

In a strip from the thought-provoking comic *Calvin and Hobbes*, the curious boy Calvin asks Hobbes, his stuffed tiger who comes to life in his imagination, “Why do you suppose we’re here?” They are both sitting on the ground, leaning against a large tree. Hobbes replies, “Because we walked here.” “No,

no,” Calvin retorts, “I mean here on earth.” Hobbes replies, “Because earth can support life.” “No, I mean why are we anywhere? Why do we exist?” Again, Hobbes comments, “Because we were born.” Frustrated, Calvin moves around to the other side of the tree, lowers his head and says, “Forget it.” Hobbes concludes, “I will, thank you.”<sup>16</sup>

The Gospel of Mark does not set out to answer the question, Why do we exist? Instead it answers these questions: Who is Jesus? What is the gospel about him? How do we respond to the gospel of the kingdom about Christ Jesus, the Son of God? But in answering those questions it helps us find the answer to the question of our existence. Why are we here? In this world filled with evil, injustice, and oppression, where we are faced with trials, pains, and sufferings, why do we exist? Mark tells us that we exist to join Jesus in his victory. Arise and follow the Son! Through Jesus’ sufferings the power of death has been broken, the reign of God has begun, and salvation has arrived. “In the midst of a world of bad news,” we have the good news of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>17</sup>

16 Bill Watterson, *Weirdos from Another Planet* (Kansas City, MO: Universal Press Syndicate, 1990), 21.

17 For some of the words and ideas for this paragraph see Strauss, *Mark*, 20.